**Everything I Know About Curriculum Mapping I Learned From Lola**

*By Piper Riddle, EBL Specialist*

I live in the mountains and work in the city, so I have the opportunity to drive about 100 miles to work and back each day. The daily commute was a big deal to me when I first took this job, because although I am an experienced driver, (having been raised in Idaho, I’ve had my driver’s license since the age of fourteen), I have my challenges.

Those challenges are two-fold: 1. I have zero sense of direction, and 2. I am easily distracted. These limitations result in experiences wherein I am either lost, extremely stressed when encountering new locations, or I end up in a place I hadn’t intended because I wasn’t paying attention and missed my exit.

Again, I want to emphasize that I am NOT (contrary to what my husband might tell you) a poor driver. I believe myself to be safe, reliable, and highly skilled when it comes to driving itself. I can shift, brake, steer and cruise with the best of them. And yet, I am here to tell you that my driving proficiencies increased ten-fold when I purchased and employed my GPS, affectionately know as “Lola”.

Suddenly, I was daring to go places I had never been before. Brigham City, Kamas, Logan, and St. George were just a few of the exotic locations that I never would have driven to on my own, and yet have since owning a GPS. I was commuting to work the other day, reflecting on my appreciation of Lola and my newfound independence when it occurred to me that my GPS serves me the same way a curriculum map might serve a teaching professional.

1. **My GPS increases my reliability and accuracy as a driver.** This makes sense. You take a skilled driver with a tool that provides ongoing critical information, and of course the reliability and accuracy improves! But for me, there’s been more to it than that. I’ve also found that my confidence has increased. My focus has increased. My driving has become more intentional. I mentioned before that I am highly distractible (I prefer to think of it as multi-tasking) and with Lola’s ever-present promptings (“Turn left in 300 feet”) I find that I am less easily distracted. She keeps me focused on my objective. She allows me to anticipate maneuvers ahead, and gives me sufficient time to strategize and adjust should there be any roadblocks or construction. This level of support also improves my daydreaming (multi-tasking) because I know that Lola will remind me what to do coming up, and I feel I can be more creative in my thought processes.
2. **My GPS doesn't tell me HOW to drive, it tells me WHERE to drive.**  My husband feels that Lola can be “bossy” at times, but I consider her gentle nagging (“Recalculating… turn right”) to be a valuable asset to make sure I get to where I am headed. She does recalculate, and helps me get back on track when I do mess up. Sometimes, I just need to make a U-turn. I find that if I heed her instructions, I am 99% guaranteed to get to my destination.
3. **My GPS gives me the information I need to make pacing decisions.** Once I have input the location to which I am headed, Lola quickly informs me of my estimated time of arrival (ETA). This ETA is based on assumptions that I am following an exact speed limit and that I do not make any detours while en route. There are times when I have miscalculated the time required to drive somewhere, and I will need to (within reason ☺) adjust my speed to make up for any lost time. If I have planned well, and I see based on my ETA that I will arrive early, I can allow for a leisurely drive, and may even make a pit stop for a treat if time allows. The benefit of my GPS is that I have the information of how long it will take me to get to my destination, and I can make adjustments to my pacing and to my time depending on that information.
4. **My GPS has increased opportunities for teaming and collaboration.** You may think I’m stretching a bit here, and perhaps I am, but if you’ll indulge me... occasionally a co-worker will ask to follow me to a location because they know that I will be following my GPS, and that they can rely on me to get to our destination in a timely and accurate manner. Often I am the “designated driver” at work, not because anyone is incapacitated (let’s not start *that* rumor), but rather because my GPS makes me a more effective and efficient transportation option. You can see that my willingness to use my GPS as a guide has increased my value as a collaborative team member.
5. **I am the driver. My GPS is a supportive guide, but ultimately it is up to me regarding where I am headed and if I get there.** Not to belabor this point, but I think this is a critical idea: we do not blindly follow our GPS into a lake (unless you are Michael from The Office… ask me and I’ll send you the video clip), nor do we blame our GPS or Google maps when we turn in front of an oncoming vehicle (unless you’re that tourist in Park City that sued Google maps for “getting her hit by a car” when she was following their route). My GPS is there to offer guidance and directions, but she does not replace my ability to think critically, to recognize when I need to adjust, nor to actually drive the car for me (although that would be nice… aren’t they working on cars that will drive themselves places while the driver catches a snooze? Something to look in to…).

I could go on, but I think I’ve made my point. Much like my GPS, curriculum maps serve as a helpful tool to increase our probability that we “get” where we intended, or in other words, that we teach our entire core standards prior to the end of the school year. Curriculum maps offer guidelines for sequencing and pacing, with the understanding that we may need to adjust the pacing according to the needs of our students and according to the amount of instructional time we have dedicated to the content.

For example, if it’s October and I’m already two weeks behind my curriculum map, I know that I need to make adjustments either to the amount of time I spend in that content area or to my instructional strategies (either I need to, 1. take more time in class to focus on that particular content area or, 2. consider changing my instructional approach to ensure more of my students get it sooner than later or, 3. do both).

If I ignore my curriculum map, I no longer have the following assurances: that I will be able to teach my entire core prior to the end of the year, that I will purposefully attend to every core standard, or that I will be able to collaborate with my grade level or department team in planning for instruction or differentiating based on common instruction and assessments.

I’m almost two years into this job, and although my commute has become somewhat routine (give or take the occasional deer or moose on the road), I still use Lola every day. You see, I’ve found that as I’ve become increasingly comfortable and fluent in my daily commute, I need her now more than ever. My GPS tracks for me where I have been and reminds me how I got there. She gives me warnings of road construction. She keeps me from daydreaming past a necessary exit. Her verbal prodding and attention to the details of an otherwise predictable commute brings my attention back to the task at hand. Is Lola my cure for ADD-induced driving? Perhaps not, but like a curriculum map, my GPS gives me the guidance and direction to get me to where I want to be: serving and working with the teachers and students in Canyons School District.